

MANAGEMENT TOOLS

ILLEGIB

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Cutting Correspondence Costs

The written word is expensive. Drafted or dictated correspondence costs from \$1.50 to \$2.00 per page. A glance at your files (and some simple multiplication) will confirm that this cost is a major one to the Organization.

But you can cut correspondence costs by careful planning to:

Avoid retyping and rewriting.

Write to express not impress.

Prevent the creation of nonessential copies.

Use less expensive substitutes for costlier dictated or drafted correspondence.

Here's how.

TO Avoid Retyping and Rewriting

Follow Organization format standards and correspondence handling procedures. They were adopted from many tested systems and a consideration of Organization-wide preferences and needs. They were established to provide that uniformity which is essential to efficient correspondence operations. Individual preferences for special formats and procedures lead to confusion over "what is standard" and contribute greatly to the amount of retyping required.

Limit retyping and rewriting jobs to instances in which you can truthfully say "yes" to these questions:

1. Will the present version fail to bring the required results.
2. Will the paper create a deservedly bad impression of your Office or of the Organization?
3. Is the nature of the correspondence such that it must be reworked until absolutely no further improvement appears possible?
4. Would you, from the viewpoint of a taxpayer, say that the paper should be reworked?

The fact that much retyping and rewriting could well be eliminated does not imply that our standards should be lowered. It does suggest, however, that a piece of correspondence should be judged for adequacy on the basis of common sense rather than on trivialities, or personal preferences. That being so, there is a point where further improvements fail to justify spending more time in rewriting or retyping.

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WRITE TO EXPRESS NOT IMPRESS

Apply the "Four S Formula" to your writing: Shortness, Simplicity, Sincerity, and Strength. Concise clear writing has a far reaching effect. Less time is needed to prepare, read and understand it. Misinterpretations are avoided; good relations are maintained. We can't all be literary masters. We can strive, however, to rid our writing of the more common barriers to effective communication. Here is a partial check list to guide you. Each "No" answer indicates a potential area for improvement.

1. Are most of your letters or memorandums less than a page long?
2. Is your average sentence less than 22 words?
3. Do you keep paragraphs short--less than 10 lines?
4. Do you know some good techniques for beginning your correspondence naturally and conversationally?
5. Do you paraphrase items that do not call for a verbatim quotation?
6. Do you use personal pronouns freely, particularly "You?"
7. Do you know when the six little verb thieves, make, take, give, hold, have and be rob your writing of its strength, as in made the decision rather than decided?
8. Do you prefer active verbs (the official read the letter) to passive ones (the letter was read by the official)?
9. Do you overwork prepositional phrases such as for the purpose of (for), with reference to (about, concerning), and many others?
10. Do you answer a question before explaining the answer?

PREVENT NONESSENTIAL COPIES

Copies are costly. They add to the volume of records the Organization must handle, store and dispose of. They slow down typing operations. Often typing and proofreading time is doubled when that "one extra copy" makes two typings necessary. Put a price tag on each copy. Route a single copy to several offices if time and circumstances permit. State your copy needs specifically. Limit courtesy copies to essentials. Count your copies; make your copies count.

USE SUBSTITUTES

Is typed correspondence always necessary? If not, dash off a note by hand on an office memorandum form or on a transmittal slip.

Does every reply, concurrence, or approval call for a separate piece of correspondence? Provide for these initially when setting up the format of your paper.

How about transmittal correspondence? Is it always necessary? Perhaps a hand-written routing sheet or transmittal slip will do. Or better still, consider revising the format of the material to provide spaces for "To," "From," and "Signature" and eliminate the transmittal correspondence entirely.

Does every instruction or decision have to be in writing. Consider handling more of your routine business by phone, or personal contact if appropriate.

Does every letter or memorandum have to be drafted or dictated? Consider using form letters (or memorandums) and pattern correspondence whenever possible. They eliminate:

UNNECESSARY
DICTATING



UNNECESSARY
TYPING



UNNECESSARY
REVIEWING



UNNECESSARY
FILING



Form letters (and memorandums) are appropriate if the message:

1. Is recurring routine business or information.
2. Is not personal or will not bring grief or disappointment to the reader.
3. Has 5, 10, 15, or 20 lines and is used more than 30, 20, 15, or 10 times per month, respectively.

Pattern letters (composed of selected pattern or sample paragraphs) are appropriate in lieu of form correspondence when the appearance of an individually typed letter or memorandum is called for.

When to use form and pattern correspondence as well as other cost cutting techniques can be determined simply and inexpensively from an analysis of sample correspondence. Two sources are generally available -- reading files, or extra copies collected during a sampling period. Additionally, in headquarters your Records Officer or a member of the Records Management Staff is available to help you. From such a survey and the tips in this article you can achieve astonishing results in:

Better correspondence prepared by speedier, simpler, and more economical means.

Less correspondence to manage, store and dispose.